



United Methodist Disaster Recovery

October 7, 2003

LOUISIANA CONFERENCE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

RECOVERY IN THE MIDST OF DISASTER

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On October 3, 2002 Hurricane Lili ravished the coastal communities of South Louisiana. As the storm dropped from category 5 to category 2 much of the anticipation that goes with such a storm began to diminish. The media turned their attention to other news worthy issues. But even at a Category 2 Hurricane, hundreds of our *big old Oak Trees* were ripped out of the ground devastating our landscape, homes and transportation (a fete of removal of its own to deal with). At the same time the winds ripped off roofs, blew over trailers, knocked homes off their pillars, burst open doors and windows allowing the rains that ensued for weeks after the storm to continue to destroy our homes and places of business. Downed electrical wires and blocked roadways called for relentless hours of work for the first responders to disaster.

There were 176,317 FEMA intakes. As the first responders commitments came to an end, the

needs of the poor, elderly, disabled and single parents began to worsen. How were they to live through this setback? How could they ever work through the *papers* that came from F.E.M.A.? No insurance or too little an amount to even begin heading towards recovery. How could they hope to ever put their lives back together?

The United Methodist Church on our General Church level has been committing to helping in disasters since World War II. U.M.C.O.R. (United Methodist Committee on Relief) known among disaster responders, enables our churches within the effected state to be able to rise up in response – thus the formation of Louisiana United Methodist Disaster Recovery UMDR) after Hurricane Lili. We have become recovery responders who stay on location for the long haul, helping to rebuild lives as well as homes for those who are financially impoverished and are in need of a helping hand. It is a call for the church “*to be the Church*”, and the United Methodist Church along with many other denominations has accepted that call.

Louisiana ranks fifth in the nation of people and children living below the poverty rate, we rank fourth among our southern neighbors. The population in Louisiana is 4,465,430. Before Hurricane Lili struck her blow, 16.2% of our people were living below the poverty level, 38.6% earned less than 1 ½ times the poverty level.

(Figures are from Council for a Better Louisiana (CABL) – www.cabl.org Fact Book)

When the wrecking winds of hurricane force blows across the badly maintained homes of the poor, major damage occurs. It is our mission to be there for these people. Through the collaborative efforts of U.M.C.O.R. and the Louisiana Conference of the United Methodist Church, we have over the past year been involved with 334 cases (and numbers continue to add on as we find people who have "fallen through the cracks"). We have addressed the needs of 162 families and are continuing to work with 98 families to bring them to recovery. It has been through the efforts of approximately 971 volunteers that we have been able to make this happen. An office staff of caseworkers succeeds in bringing families in our caseload through a number of resources that help with funding beyond the FEMA allotments, or in some cases where they were denied FEMA funding. Caseworkers resource families further in health and social issues, and have been invaluable friends for our families. We have a volunteer coordinator that works with the recruiting of volunteers throughout the church and civic organizations- some locally, others nationwide. A construction foreman is responsible for making ready the jobsites and leading volunteers to accomplish the work.

The United Methodist response is an established means for local peoples to become involved in taking action in their disaster response. Every community has churches that are to reach out to put their hands on the needs of the poor. Churches need to be included in your VOAD meetings. The United Methodist Church has a system in place. In major disasters the Bishop of that area assesses the destruction and makes the call to U.M.C.O.R. for support when needed. Help arrives from U.M.C.O.R. to assist in organizing the response office, to guide paid staff in collaborating with

F.E.M.A., the American Red Cross and VOAD and to inform us as to joining or helping to establish Unmet Needs Committees or Interfaith Groups (set up by Church World Service) that are to resource those who can not meet recovery by their own means. U.M.C.O.R. has a database that helps to organize case management, volunteers and construction needs. It is very helpful to be a part of canvassing in the areas of destruction to know what and where the needs are. We worked in collaboration with VOA, Options for Independence and with Neighborhood Canvassing Blitzes that UMDR set up. As we began a data base of family cases, we brought in volunteer estimators from CRWRC (Reformed Church). Cases were being brought to Unmet Needs Committees, volunteers were being recruited to rehab homes of our elderly, disabled and single parent families, an experience to be a part of! Training through American Red Cross for disaster is very important. It is always good to be prepared before disaster hits.

Our efforts were not accomplished alone. Many agencies have gathered around Unmet Needs Committees striving to supply resources for those areas of people's lives in distress as a result of natural disasters. When others have reached recovery, and a year from this disaster has gone by and those living on the margin are still anxiously waiting solutions for their ongoing problems, we work hard to not only bring hope for those in need, but a stronger defense against disaster as we strengthen homes to be better prepared for the future onset of storms.

Task Force, Staff and Other Team Players

Members Task Force: Louisiana Bishop William W. Hutchinson, Dr. Don Cottrill, Chairman, Mr. Joseph Burke, Rev. Bill Moon, Rev. Scott Bullock, Mr. Walter Parker, Sr., Rev. Walter Parker, Jr., Rev. Susan Pugh, Mrs. Alice Rothrock, Ex. Officio: Rev. Dale Hensarling, Rev. Larry Norman, Rev. Tom Hazelwood, U.M.C.O.R.

Members of Staff: Sarah Schoeffler, Director; LaTrelle Boudreaux, Office Manager; Elizabeth Bodin, Volunteer Coordinator; Rick Gassman, Construction Foreman; Jenni Lasseigne, Case Manager; Rebecca Rutherford, Case Worker; Deborah Vining, Case Worker; Elbert Dawson, Case Worker

Stipend Volunteers: Gina Guilbeaux, Shawn Riley, Kenneth Ransonnet

Collaborative Agencies: United Way of Acadiana, Unmet Needs of Acadiana, 232-HELP, S.M.I.L.E. Community Action Agency, Council on Aging, Interfaith Groups, Catholic Diocese of Lafayette and Houma-Terrebonne, Lutheran Disaster, Presbyterian Church, TRAC of Houma, Volunteers of America, Options for Independence, American Red Cross, FEMA, and numerous volunteers, local and from throughout the United States.